



PARTNERS IN FLIGHT

Oregon/Washington Chapter

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Partners In Flight is an international coalition of government agencies, conservation groups, academic institutions, private organizations and citizens dedicated to the long-term maintenance of healthy populations of native landbirds

Finding Common Ground at the Sandhill Crane Festival

by Randy Hill, Wildlife Biologist, Columbia NWR,

The fifth annual Sandhill Crane Festival on March 22-24, 2002 was again a huge success for Columbia National Wildlife Refuge (CNWR) and the Othello Washington community. Final attendance numbers are not in yet, but visitors from across the state and across state lines came to enjoy a diverse program of speakers, field trips, and children's activities in addition to guided crane viewing opportunities. The festival's success can be attributed to the good outreach and diverse partners that have joined to support and promote the Festival, and to the volunteer base that resulted from these partnerships based on a simple premise: FIND COMMON GROUND.

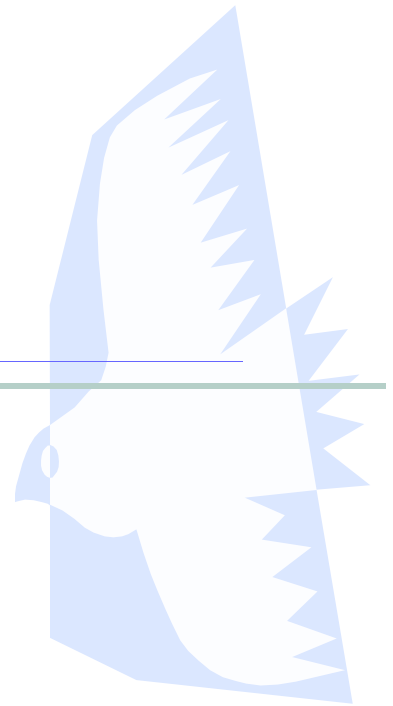
Consider the list of partners at this year's festival: Greater Othello Chamber of Commerce, City of Othello, CNWR, International Crane Foundation (ICF), Central Basin Audubon Society (CBAS), WA Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), East Columbia Basin Irrigation District (ECBID), Othello School District, Old Hotel Art Gallery, and Othello Community Schools. There is also unsolicited promotion from the Othello Outlook and Columbia Basin Herald, and from the Washington Potato Commission. Huh? The Potato Commission promoting eco-tourism? It was not always like this!

The festival started as a partnership between CNWR and the Othello Chamber of Commerce in 1997. Othello is a town driven by irrigated agriculture. In fact, this year's theme was the 50th anniversary of water deliveries to the Columbia Basin Irrigation Project (CBIP). CNWR is a Project feature, a community of shrub-steppe within channeled scablands created by the Missoula Floods, where leakage from Project canals and reservoirs and a risen water table from new irrigation created a series of wetlands in depressions. CBIP was responsible for the destruction of more than 600,000 acres of shrub-steppe vegetation, but also created a desert oasis in an area that receives about 8" of precipitation per year. Visitor use to the Othello area is tied to farm commerce and to recreation associated with hunting, fishing, and other outdoor activities available on CNWR and surrounding lands. The Festival was seen as an opportunity to increase visibility of CNWR and add diversity to visitor uses.

The first festival committee was small, with planning led initially by the local Ducks Unlimited chair and through the end by three core members representing the Chamber of Commerce, CNWR, and Jane Grant, who wore several hats as a CNWR volunteer, CBAS education chair, and local farmer living in the heart of Sandhill Crane country. WDFW's Watchable Wildlife program and ICF were instrumental in supporting educational opportunities, while Washington Audubon through CBAS helped with promotion, and even held a State-level meeting here in conjunction with the Festival. The organizers and the 400+ that attended the first Festival felt great success. But opposing viewpoints soon followed from a "green" writer labeling the refuge as a gem in a sea of destruction (farmland) and a Farm Bureau rep saying eco-tourism is a joke and will not amount to much; not exactly what we had in mind for FINDING COMMON GROUND. This happened to coincide with much public debate from both sides on who would manage the Hanford Reach and shrub-steppe habitat on the Wahluke Slope, a half hour drive from Othello.

The next year things really turned around for one main reason: Dick Erickson, manager of ECBID, took over as chair of the Festival Committee. Erickson is an engineer and strong advocate for irrigated farming, but also an accomplished hiker who has been to the Himalayas above

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/Crane Festival, continued/

18,000 feet. The changes he implemented included much better delegation and planning following suggestions from festival organization instructor Nancy Millar, and the addition of agriculture guides (to complement wildlife guides) on the crane viewing busses to explain what people were seeing while passing through cropland areas. ICF co-founder George Archibald talked about the importance of agriculture to Sandhill Cranes. It was amazing how support within the local community changed when the common ground of agriculture and wildlife was linked. The Festival became an outreach opportunity for both wildlife and agriculture.

The last three years have indicated increasing support on both sides of the Cascades. With attendance rising from 400+ to 600 to 750 to 1200 in consecutive years, the outreach opportunities have increased as well. Last year the Washington Potato Commission saw the opportunity and jumped on board, and may have been the highlight for many Festival attendees because they passed out free potato chips at their table. I received an interesting e-mail from one of this year's presenter before the Festival took place. He said it must be nice having an unlimited advertising budget, referring to the reader board along I-5 near Tacoma. I had to inform him that I had no idea what the ad cost because the Potato Commission sponsored it each of the last two years. Four years ago we had almost no support from the agriculture community, and therefore very little support from the Othello businesses and potential volunteer base within the community. Now we have local merchants welcoming Crane festival attendees, and farmers calling in to report where large flocks of cranes are being seen. That was especially important this year because most of the cranes didn't make it north until just a few days before the Festival.

What is the benefit gained of promoting agriculture when farm fields have replaced some of the very best shrub-steppe habitat that occurred in Washington? I had a question/statement to that effect from a presenter and activist, wondering why we were doing an agriculture tour more than a crane tour. I had to take him aside and talk about the lectures that were scheduled during the following seven-hour period, including the two topics that he was speaking on. The presentations were on geology, backyard habitat, bats, Woodland Park zoo, Potholes wildlife before the irrigation project, local breeding birds, field notes, nature events, cranes in literature, shrub-steppe habitat and birds, owls, coastal birding, crane research, grouse, history of CBIP, a planned scenic highway corridor, agriculture and the local Hispanic population, falconry, and salamanders. I pointed out that the program was both diverse and heavily slanted toward birds and their habitats, most of which are native habitats rather than agriculture. The field trips also included sage grouse, shrub-steppe, Lower Grand Coulee and diverse refuge habitats as birding opportunities, in most cases targeting rare or endemic species. This gained exposure to the importance of what we have left and how scarce it is becoming. My refuge field trip was a lesson in "being nice to your neighbor" as a local landowner.

Project Adds More Western Bluebirds to Northern Willamette Valley

See 2001 fledging results of non-profit group, Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project's website:
<http://www.prescottbluebird.com/>

***Do you have suggestions on ways to improve
this newsletter? Please send them to
Jenny_Valdivia@fws.gov***



The Oregon/Washington Partners In Flight newsletter is published twice yearly, in spring and fall. To submit an article for consideration, please e-mail Jenny_Valdivia@fws.gov

We are always interested in hearing what YOU are doing to conserve native landbirds. Drop us a line today!

We Need You!

The Northwest Habitat Institute is leading a project to survey for and monitor snag-nesting purple martins in western Oregon. Currently we have 15 partners involved, among them the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Oregon Department of Forestry, U.S. Forest Service, Purple Martin Conservation Association, Oregon Zoo, Jeff Allen Conservation Fund, Army Corps of Engineers, and several Audubon Society chapters.

This project compliments and expands on Eric Horvath's 1998 effort to catalogue locations of purple martins nesting mostly in artificial structures. We could use your help in two ways:

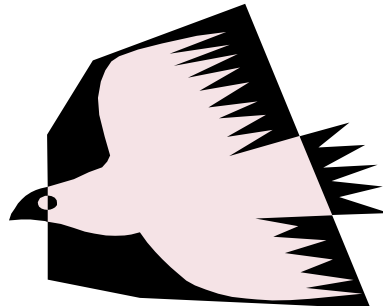
- 1) Let us know of any snag-nesting purple martins you find. We are particularly interested in colonies along the valley side of the Coast and Cascade Ranges, i.e., away from the coast itself.
- 2) Adopt a colony. As our field crew finds new sites we would like to have volunteers adopt a colony for more in-depth observations. This would involve committing to visit one site at least 4 times between the end of May and the end of August for at least an hour each visit, and recording the activity and behaviors seen. No hiking is required. We can reimburse each driving volunteer \$50 for gas.

Contact Kelly Bettinger at phoebe@peak.org or 541-753-2199 to sign up as a volunteer or to let us know if you find snag-nesting martins anytime between now and the end of August 2002.

with more land juxtaposed to CNWR than any other was on the bus. I was able to sidestep the issue of trespass cattle while still making sure that he could see it for himself, and talk about the importance of removing Russian-olive and replacing it with a non-invasive native tree.

So how does this type of outreach benefit the issues that PIF is pursuing? Let's face it; much of the money that is available for habitat work is dependant on a non-federal match. And a majority of the restoration work that is needed occurs on private land. The best chance of funding will be projects that have multiple partners and demonstrations of support from those partners. We will probably partner with that very landowner when riparian restoration along Crab Creek becomes a reality. And he will probably listen to us when we tell him that one project is better for wildlife than another, or how he could improve upon a plan that he might come up with. Building relationships rather than roadblocks is an important step, and you don't have to throw away your principles to do it. Just FIND COMMON GROUND.

A perfect example of the benefits of a partnership is our relationship with ICF. We certainly have more in common with them than a potato farmer, but how many farmers around Othello would have ever heard of the International Crane Foundation if George Archibald hadn't talked about cranes and their dependence on agriculture back in 1999, and now fund advertising along I-5? And what do you think the odds were of getting Peter Matthiessen to spend two days in Othello if George Archibald hadn't "discussed the possibility" with him? And what might Peter Matthiessen have said at our banquet, knowing the content of some of his past writings, if he hadn't spent time with some local Othello folks and seen thousands of cranes on local cornfields? And what are the possibilities that Peter Matthiessen might write a book on the vanishing shrub-steppe after spending 8 hours with Mike Schroeder looking at sage and sharp-tailed grouse in Douglas County, and maybe discussing partnerships with local ranchers on protecting the habitat critical for those species? Well, that may have to wait until after he finishes writing about Antarctica.



Aliens Fly From Puget Sound Prairie

In September and October 2001, a unique weed control effort was completed on Rocky Prairie Natural Area Preserve in Thurston County, Washington.

Mature Douglas Fir trees were removed from the upland prairie remnant using helicopter logging methods. Cessation of the historic natural and Native American set fire cycle has allowed Douglas fir and other alien woody species to encroach onto the prairie. Aerial removal of the large trees was necessary to protect a large population of golden Indian paintbrush (*Castilleja levisecta*), a federally listed plant. The 35-acre Rocky Prairie Preserve supports one of the largest remaining populations of Indian paintbrush remaining in western Washington.

The preserve is owned and managed by the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (WDNR). The project began by WDNR staff cruising the Douglas fir stand and marking over 100 trees for removal. The trees were then felled away from areas where paintbrush grows, and whole trees were taken away using a Huey UH1 helicopter. At a nearby landing, the trees were cut to merchantable lengths, their limbs removed and chipped, followed by the chips and logs being hauled from the site. A smaller helicopter carted away smaller limbs that were gathered by volunteers and loaded onto slings.

Restoration of native prairie vegetation in the logged areas will continue over the next few years. Several inches of fir needles will be raked off the logged areas and the area will be planted with Roemer's fescue seedlings and other native prairie forbs grown from seeds collected on the prairie by volunteers. The WDNR is planning to remove the remainder of the fir trees in the next few years as funding allows.

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service assisted WDNR with this project by providing cost-share funds through the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP). Other partners in this project include the Nature Conservancy of Washington, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and numerous private volunteers. Efforts like this project are critical to the protection and survival of the South Puget Sound prairie system, which has been reduced to less than 3% of its historic size. The prairies support many other sensitive wildlife species, such as the Mazama pocket gopher, streaked horn lark, Western bluebird, Western meadowlark, and more than 25 species of butterflies, three of which are state candidates for listing and/or federal species of concern.

Cities to Sign Urban Conservation Treaties

In conjunction with International Migratory Bird Day observances, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will sign an Urban Migratory Bird Conservation Treaty with the City of Anchorage, Alaska, on May 18. Also, USFWS has tentative plans to sign Urban Migratory Bird Conservation Treaties in Philadelphia on May 8 and in Houston on June 8. Urban Migratory Bird Conservation Treaties, which carry a matching grant, commit USFWS to a long-term partnership with cities and their conservation partners for the benefit of migratory birds.

The Urban Migratory Bird Conservation Treaty program was piloted in 1999 in New Orleans, Louisiana. On May 5, the Baltimore Orioles and FWS will sponsor special International Migratory Bird Day activities before and during the game with the Kansas City Royals at Baltimore's Camden Yards stadium.

"Partners in Flight? What's that?"

A primer from the national website that helps demystify Partners in Flight...

Partners in Flight was launched in 1990 in response to growing concerns about declines in the populations of many land bird species, and in order to emphasize the conservation of birds not covered by existing conservation initiatives. The initial focus was on species that breed in the Nearctic (North America) and winter in the Neotropics (Central and South America), but the focus has spread to include most landbirds and other species requiring terrestrial habitats.

Strengthened linkages with other conservation efforts is leading, at least in some cases, to comprehensive conservation for all native birds. The central premise of Partners in Flight has been that the resources of public and private organizations in North and South America must be combined, coordinated, and increased in order to achieve success in conserving bird populations in this hemisphere.

Partners In Flight is a cooperative effort involving partnerships among federal, state and local government agencies, philanthropic foundations, professional organizations, conservation groups, industry, the academic community, and private individuals. Currently partners include 16 federal agencies, 40 non-government organizations (NGOs), over 60 state and provincial fish and wildlife agencies, numerous universities, and the forest industry, and the list is growing daily. A complete list of contacts is available in the Directory section of the [national website](#). All Partners In Flight meetings are open to anyone interested in bird conservation and we eagerly seek your contribution.

Partners In Flight's goal is to focus resources on improving monitoring and inventory of native birds and on research, management and education programs involving birds and their habitats. The strategy is to stimulate cooperative public and private sector efforts in North America and the neotropics to meet these goals. The power of Partners in Flight lies in the synergy that builds when diverse, committed groups who care about birds work together for a common goal.

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Visit the new US integrated bird conservation web site!

<http://www.nabci-us.org>

This site is dedicated to promoting and advancing integrated bird conservation in the United States.

Online you will find a variety of tools and resources including:

- An easy-to-browse Bird Conservation Regions (BCR) map hot-linked to BCR descriptions
- Links to:
 - Bird conservation initiatives and plans, Joint Ventures, and BCR staff
 - Migratory Bird Data Center maintained by the USFWS/USGS
 - Bird Conservation Directory hosted by the American Bird Conservancy
 - BCR map hot-linked to Species Assessment Scores based on Partners In Flight's Species Assessment database hosted by the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory

A host of information on the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI), including downloadable documents about the NABCI Vision, the U.S. Committee's Action Plan, and Committee and Working Group contact lists and meeting minutes

Coming soon to the site:

- * Stories from the Field, stories of how people are working together towards integrated bird conservation
- * National news briefs on integrated bird conservation
- * A host of links to organizations working on bird conservation
- * Upcoming workshops, meetings, conferences, and other events

And the winner is...

Bob Altman, reluctant star of Oregon/Washington Partners In Flight, was honored with a Stewardship Award at the National PIF conference last September in Monterey, California.

Bob works for the American Bird Conservancy from his home in Corvallis and has authored or co-authored five Bird Conservation Plans. He has been deeply involved in PIF in the Northwest since its inception. Congratulations Bob!